

Habakkuk Explained & Applied 35

Ger de Koning



The Book of Habakkuk

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Confidence

Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis
Exo – Exodus
Lev – Leviticus
Num – Numbers
Deu – Deuteronomy
Jos – Joshua
Jdg – Judges
Rth – Ruth
1Sam – First Samuel
2Sam – Second Samuel
1Kgs – First Kings
2Kgs – Second Kings
1Chr – First Chronicles
2Chr – Second Chronicles
Ezra – Ezra
Neh – Nehemiah
Est – Esther
Job – Job
Psa – Psalms
Pro – Proverbs
Ecc – Ecclesiastes
Song – Song of Songs
Isa – Isaiah
Jer – Jeremiah
Lam – Lamentations
Eze – Ezekiel
Dan – Daniel
Hos – Hosea
Joel – Joel
Amos – Amos
Oba – Obadiah
Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of General Format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Book of Habakkuk

Introduction

In this book we see how faith trusts in the LORD in spite of everything. Habakkuk first complains in Habakkuk 1 about the iniquity that surrounds him in Judah. He is indignant about the sins of the people. As a reaction to this, God shows him that He sends the Chaldeans – or: the Babylonians – as a disciplinary rod to His people because of their sins. Habakkuk’s reaction to this shows the love he has for God’s people, because he complains to God about this oppressor that treats his beloved people so cruelly.

In Habakkuk 2 comes the response of God to Habakkuk’s complaint. He says that He knows the ungodliness of the Chaldeans and will judge them for it. He will certainly let that judgment come, but not directly. For that time of waiting He tells the believer, the righteous, how he can endure that time and that is by his faith: the righteous will live by his faith.

At the end of the book, in Habakkuk 3, the prophet rises above all circumstances. He trusts in God Himself and rejoices in Him, no matter what may happen and even though there is no blessing yet to be seen. This is where a living faith, that is a living trust in God, brings the believer. Thus, the believer goes from fear to trust, and instead of being a believer full of worries and questions to God, becomes a worshiper of God.

Of the personal history of Habakkuk nothing is known. His name means ‘embrace’. He embraces his people, takes them in his arms to comfort them as a mother comforts a crying child. He assures the people that everything is in God’s hands and that He is capable of turning everything for the better. He also embraces God, in the sense that he clings to God with all the questions he has about what God is doing. We see this in the dialogues he has with God. His questions and feelings of despair do not cause him to say goodbye to God, but to attach himself even more intimately to God. That may also be the effect with us. We are allowed to go to Him with all the questions we have.

The time in which Habakkuk prophesies has to do with the announcement of the coming of the Chaldeans because of the unfaithfulness of God's people. That coming is near because it will take place in his days (Hab 1:5). So it concerns the generation living before the years 606-586 BC. This is the time in which Jeremiah and Ezekiel also prophesied.

It is a time of crisis. This makes Habakkuk's prophecy topical for us because we too live in days that are rushing towards the great crisis of the end times. We can learn from Habakkuk how to look at the development of evil and how we can talk about it with God.

The iniquities of God's people unleash a holy wrath and a great sorrow in this man of God. But while his heart is tormented by their evil behavior, at the same time he feels how miserable they are and wants to make their cause his own. He connects with them in their misery. That makes Habakkuk a prophet who resembles Jeremiah more than any other prophet. He lives more personally in the scenes he describes than the other prophets. He feels or experiences everything in the way as Jeremiah did. Not only does he *speak* as a prophet, but he also *lives* as a prophet.

This last aspect also makes his book different from that of the other prophets, because his book is a display of the experiences of his soul. Habakkuk is unique among the prophets because he does not so much speak to the people in the name of God, but more to God about the people. His speaking to God shows that he struggles with Him about His actions with people. He wants to know how God works and why He does it. He doesn't rest until he knows God's thoughts about it.

Knowledge of God's thoughts is only gained in personal faith exercises. What others have learned and written down in faith exercises can help us, but we will never learn the truth of God without personal exercises. If we have average intelligence, we can learn many truths by heart, but that is not the same as knowing God's thoughts. If we know many truths only intellectually, the result is "high truth, low practice".

The form of the book is a two-way conversation, a dialogue. As far as the contents of the dialogue is concerned, a comparison can be made with Jonah and with Job. Jonah and Job also had dialogues with God about His way of acting, which was incomprehensible to them.

Habakkuk is the prophet of faith. The key verse of his prophecy is 'live by faith' (Hab 2:4). The main theme is the oppression and torment that is the part of the God-fearing on the one side and the prosperity of the wicked on the other. This subject has often caused great wrestling among believers (cf. Psa 73:1-17).

The New Testament quotes a few times from this book.

1. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, quotes the key verse of this book (Hab 2:4) three times in his letters to illustrate the fundamental truth of justification by faith (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).
2. In the book of Acts Paul quotes another verse of Habakkuk in a speech (Acts 13:40-41; Hab 1:5).
3. In the letter to the Philippians there is a clear reference to the practice of faith (Phil 4:4,10-19; Hab 3:17-18).

We will elaborate on this in the discussion of the verses quoted.

Division of the book

1. Introduction (Habakkuk 1:1)
2. First complaint of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:2-4)
3. God's answer to the first complaint (Habakkuk 1:5-11)
4. Second complaint of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:12-2:1)
5. God's answer to the second complaint (Habakkuk 2:2-20)
 - a. Introduction (Habakkuk 2:2-3)
 - b. Indictment (Habakkuk 2:4-5)
 - c. Judgment (Habakkuk 2:6-20)
6. The prayer of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:1-19)
 - a. Introduction (Habakkuk 3:1)
 - b. Prayer (Habakkuk 3:2)
 - c. Theophany or appearance of God (Habakkuk 3:3-15)
 - d. Habakkuk's answer (Habakkuk 3:16-19a)
 - e. Postscript (Habakkuk 3:19b)

Habakkuk 1

Hab 1:1 | The Burden of Habakkuk

| *1 The oracle [or: burden] which Habakkuk the prophet saw.*

The prophecy is called “oracle” or “burden”. It is called a burden because the message Habakkuk receives is placed on his heart as a burden. He feels its weight. That burden weighs so heavily on him, that he is thrown down by it, but not in such a way that he is destroyed by it (cf. 2Cor 4:9b). The burden brings him to his knees and he brings the burden to God. We see in him the weakness of the earthen vessel in which the power of God becomes manifest (2Cor 4:7-9). We see this in the wonderful testimony to which he is brought by God’s grace in the last verses of his book.

Habakkuk is called “the prophet”. He speaks words that he must pass on to the people in the name of God. The message he has to pass on is not in words that have come to him, but is something he “saw”. Habakkuk complains about the sins of Israel and then about the sins of their enemies. What he has seen is the judgment of Israel and of their enemies.

Hab 1:2 | How Long, O LORD?

| *2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, “Violence!”
Yet You do not save.*

This opening verse of the dialogue between Habakkuk and the LORD sets the tone for what follows in this chapter. We feel in this chapter the tension a righteous person experiences when his prayer is not answered satisfactorily or in a way that raises even more questions.

The prophecy is meant for the people. Yet Habakkuk does not address the people, but the LORD. By writing down in a book what he speaks to God, the people become involved in his prayer. He calls for help (cf. Jona 2:2) and salvation that does not come. This call is not selfish, but is related to the honor of God. How long will God endure the dishonor inflicted upon

His Name? Habakkuk expresses the feelings of the God-fearing remnant of the people. He does not speak about the sins of the people with his countrymen, but with God.

His cry for help does not appear to have just begun. For a long time he has been in a situation where he calls for help. That appears from the words "how long". He asks "how long" he has to go on calling for help before an answer comes from God. The exclamation "how long?" is an exclamation typical of a complaint. It is done in a crisis situation from which the speaker wants to be delivered and for which he asks for help (Psa 13:1-2; 6:3; 89:46; Jer 12:4; Zec 1:12).

Habakkuk asks God why He is not hearing. The word "hear" means that an answer is expected to what has been asked. God hears him calling, but the answer is not given. This can lead to a crisis of faith. If no answer is given to a question for help, it can raise the question of the righteousness of the questioner or of the One to Whom the question is asked (cf. Job 19:7; 30:20; Psa 18:41). Is one of them perhaps unjust? Habakkuk struggles with this.

Habakkuk exclaims to God that violence is being committed. He wants God to deliver him from it. He uses this word "violence" – Hebrew *hamas* – several times in his book (Hab 1:2,3,9; 2:8,17). It is a key word in his prophecy. Violence is an evil act that causes injury and damage to a person or his property.

Violence is common among God's people. Habakkuk observes that exploitation takes place on a large scale in a cruel manner, purely for one's own sake. He wants God to deliver from that, to take away the pressure of it. Violence is one of the main manifestations of sin. Sin can be summarized in two concepts: lust and violence. Sin has come into the world through lust: Eve coveted to be God. The second sin, as a consequence of the first, is that of violence: Cain killed his brother. When the bond with God is broken, there is no respect for what belongs to the other. Lust leads to violence. Both of these main streams of sin have caused the flood (Gen 6:11).

In the time in which we live we see the pair of lust and violence become stronger and stronger in all kinds of manifestations. The lust for certain things is followed by forcibly appropriating the coveted. This is striking-

ly illustrated by a young person being interviewed after a robbery of a jeweler (March 2014). He shows a certain understanding for the fact that a robbery is committed 'in order to be able to buy something nice'. Only through repentance of sins and conversion to God, can lust and violence then be stripped of their power.

Hab 1:3 | Why?

*3 Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause [me] to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.*

Like the question "how long?" in the previous verse, the question "why?" in this verse is a question typical of the faithful remnant. The prophet as the type of the faithful remnant wonders why he, who can do nothing about it, should see all this injustice without anyone doing anything about it, not even God. Surely God sees everything, even all the injustice and the trouble it causes, doesn't He?

The prophet is in the midst of a people who do not take God into account. He observes a multitude of evil things that are expressions of violence. He speaks of "iniquity", "wickedness", "destruction and violence", "strife and contention". The prophet uses three pairs of words: "iniquity" and "wickedness", "destruction and violence", "strife and contention". Each word pair consists of words that are connected to each other according to their meaning. They describe the same situation, but with a different accent.

That it is not about evil in general in the world, but about the evil of God's people, is shown by the fact that in verses 5-6 God raises up the Chaldeans to chastise His people for it. "Destruction and violence" is being committed. Everyone wants to enrich himself at the expense of others. Because of this there is strife that leads to contention. There is no unity and no peace. Habakkuk feels powerless, but he knows that God is not. Why, then, does He do nothing about it?

In the church we unfortunately also see strife and contention. These arise when there is 'iniquity' among believers that causes 'wickedness'. Often

this is the result of domineering leaders who do not allow themselves to be corrected. They are shepherds who pasture themselves. Diotrephes is an example of this (3Jn 1:9-10). Such leaders abuse their position and act destructively and violently against anyone who does not submit to them. Such behavior does not work togetherness, but strife and contention. As a result, the church finally falls apart.

The silence of God in human affairs has always been difficult to understand. But it does not mean that there is no answer and that Divine wisdom is incapable of solving these difficulties. God sees everything and everything remains under the control of His mighty hand. This also applies to all the iniquities we see in Christianity. God does not want us to consider it small, nor does He want us to succumb to it, but to present it to Him and ask Him what He wants us to do.

Hab 1:4 | The Law Is Ignored

*4 Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted.*

The fragmentation of society and the cohesion among God's people is closely related to the ignoring of "the law" and "justice". The order in Israel is based on "the law", while "justice" sees to it that people live according to the law (Deu 17:11). If one abides by the law and justice they process the unity desired by God. The law – Hebrew torah, the five books of Moses – almost always refers to God's law, in which He reveals His will and directs man's life. Justice – Hebrew mispat – implies not only the exercise and maintenance of lawful decrees, but also all functions of government that are entrusted with them.

Because sentence is not executed quickly, the law loses its authority and power over consciences (Ecc 8:11). There is a cooling of feelings towards the law. Because of this, the law no longer has an entrance in the hearts and consciences. It can be compared to hands that become unusable when they are cold. God's law is ignored because of the spiritual coldness of people's hearts. It is not the law, but the hard, cold heart of man.

When the law is ignored, the wicked surrounds the righteous unhindered. Justice comes out in a perverted form. The wicked fixes the righteous so that he cannot carry out the law, and acts according to his own ideas, but only in twisted form. The wicked secures the righteous so that he cannot execute justice and acts according to his own judgment, so that the law is perverted and turns into the opposite of justice (cf. Psa 82:2). This is a dramatic change in which God is completely sidelined and everything completely turned upside down.

Hab 1:5 | God Is Doing Something

*5 “Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because [I am] doing something in your days—
You would not believe if you were told.*

When Habakkuk has expressed his complaint, he gets an answer from God. This shows that God is anything but an uninterested spectator of what is happening on earth. God is going to inform Habakkuk about His reaction and promises that He will judge evil. To let Habakkuk see this, He invites him and the people of Judah to look around and to look attentively among the Gentiles what He will do.

Then they will see that the Assyrian empire is being destroyed by, among others, the Babylonians, the people He will use for His work. That work is that He will distress Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, in three consecutive sieges with the ultimate result of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The order to see around means that the state of the world around them must be carefully looked at so that they will not miss anything of what is going to happen. For us, it means keeping a close eye on the current news in view of what God's Word says about future events. They think God is doing nothing, but if they pay attention, they will see how much they are mistaken.

That they will then be astonished means that the answer to Habakkuk's prayer is anything but predictable. The astonishment is repeated in two verb forms – astonishment and wonder – to emphasize the repeated and ultimately total astonishment that will overtake them (cf. Gen 43:33; Psa

48:4-5; Isa 29:9). When they have recovered from one astonishment, another astonishment will overtake them.

Paul quotes this verse after a preaching to warn the scoffers of the judgment (Acts 13:40-41). By “a work” he means the work of Christ for the redemption of sins for all who believe. Because it is not accepted, He Who accomplished this work will judge them. It has always been the case that man has refused to accept what God says about judgment. So it was with the deluge, with the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, with Ahab and Jezebel, now with regard to the judgment of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (Jer 5:12) and also with regard to the gospel (Isa 53:1).

Hab 1:6 | God Raises up the Chaldeans

*6 “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.*

Just as Isaiah describes the character of the Assyrians (Isa 5:26-30), so the LORD describes for Habakkuk the character of the Chaldeans (verses 6-11). He describes the nature of this enemy, his methods and intentions, his weapons, his attitude towards others and the deepest reason for his definitive fall.

God Himself raises up this enemy to chastise His people (cf. Psa 105:25). He “raises up the Chaldeans” (cf. Jdg 2:16). In our shortsightedness, we would only see satan’s striving to destroy God’s people. But it is important to see that the LORD Himself uses satan to discipline His people. This means that we are in His hands and not in the hands of our enemies.

The LORD gives that cruel people the opportunity to march throughout the earth (Deu 28:49). This indicates the exercise of power over an unlimited area. As a result, the Chaldeans will also conquer Israel and in the land of God “to seize dwelling places which are not theirs”. With this, God’s people will receive the righteous retribution for the behavior they themselves have so often shown towards others by taking possession of the possessions of others (Mic 2:9).

Hab 1:7 | Babylon Is Himself to God

7 *“They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.*

Babylon's performance is “dreaded and feared”. Babylon's character is rooted in self-satisfaction. He recognizes no higher authority and no dependence on anyone, which is equivalent to self-deification. His only law is what he wants, what comes out of him, and that determines the norm of his actions. Babylon behaves according to rules he has drawn up for himself, considering himself to be a power accountable to no one, not to God and not to any human being.

He does not think that anyone could be higher than himself (cf. Ecc 5:7). That is his attitude from the beginning of his existence (Gen 11:4). The Babylonians do not realize that in the role they take on, they do what God wants and that He has control over them.

Hab 1:8 | Babylon's Cavalry

8 *“Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping [down] to devour.*

From a military point of view, Babylon is not lacking in anything, not in equipment and not in the greed for conquest. Everything has been prepared down to the last detail. The distance is not an objection. In raging speed they will reach their goal, because their “horses are swifter than leopards”. They arrive with a ferocity worse than that of hungry evening wolves. Once they see their prey, they shoot at it like an eagle to devour it (cf. Jer 48:40; 49:22; Lam 4:19).

The cavalry of Babylon is compared to three predators, “leopards”, “wolves in the evening” and “an eagle”. These three predators are symbols of God's judgment of Judah (cf. Jer 5:10). Wolves in the evening are hungry because of their lack of food during the day and therefore they go out for prey in the evening (Zep 3:3). When Moses tells the people what will happen to them if they are unfaithful, he speaks of a cruel people who

will come to them and compares that people to an eagle. What Habakkuk says here is the fulfillment of what Moses said (Deu 28:49-50).

Hab 1:9 | Violence

9 *"All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces [moves] forward.
They collect captives like sand."*

They come with the intention to commit violence. Violence is the sin of Israel (verses 2-3). Now the people themselves will be punished with violence. The intention to commit violence drives “all of them”. It is not just a collective intention, in which there may be exceptions, but every soldier in that army is willing to commit violence. Their advance is unstoppable.

“Their horde of faces [moves] forward” indicates that they are completely purposeful, without looking back or aside, on their way. Everything which they encounter in opposition on their way to their goal, is knocked down. The number of prisoners of war that they make is innumerable as the sand.

Hab 1:10 | Babylon Mocks With Any Power

10 *"They mock at kings
And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
They laugh at every fortress
And heap up rubble to capture it."*

The autonomy of Babylon brings him to contempt of all other governments (cf. Job 41:25). He mocks every opposition and every opponent. He acts with the greatest self-assurance, that is how sure he is of his power. Every resistance is useless and fruitless. With ease every fortress is taken. Without any effort rubble is heaped up against the wall of a city, after which they come over the wall and capture the city.

Hab 1:11 | His Power Is His God

11 *"Then they will sweep through [like] the wind and pass on.
But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god."*

When Babylon is so busy, he will change his mind as the wind changes direction. That he passes on, means that he goes too far in his treatment of Israel. By doing so he makes himself guilty, he loads guilt on himself by overplaying his hand. In his pride he indulges in excessive violence.

Babylon makes himself guilty because he only trusts in his own power, makes his power his god. He does not take the God of heaven, the God of Israel, into account at all. He abuses the power God has given him to pursue his own interests. His desire to conquer prevails.

Hab 1:12 | Habakkuk Continues to Ask

*12 Are You not from everlasting,
O LORD, my God, my Holy One?
We will not die.
You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge;
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.*

After this description of Babylon's actions as the disciplinary rod for God's people, the problem for Habakkuk is not gone. God's statements about the disciplinary rod upset him completely. Rather, it has made his problem worse. Should this people, whose ungodliness is much greater than that of Israel, serve as a disciplinary rod for Israel? Surely that cannot be true?

He talks about this with God. That gives him a certain degree of peace in his tormented mind. This is an example for us. We are allowed to go to the Lord with everything we experience, with our joy and our sorrow. Then our daily experiences will lead us to get to know Him better.

Habakkuk speaks to God as the representative of his people. He speaks to God with some familiar names:

1. "The LORD" is the God of the covenant. That is He "from everlasting", which indicates that He is of eternity. He is the Eternal One.
2. He is "God", Who chose His people to be His property.
3. He is the "Holy One", Who is perfectly pure, Who cannot see or tolerate evil.

By speaking of "my God" and "my Holy One," he appropriates these names and thus takes possession of God, as it were, in that special trial of

faith. From that personal relationship with God in the knowledge of Him as the Eternal One, the Pure One and the Holy One, Habakkuk knows by faith that God's plans will not fail. Those who believe will not die and therefore will not miss the promised blessing. The statement "we will not die" is a certainty and not a wish. Habakkuk complains, but he is not rebellious. He believes that God is righteous and sticks to His plans. He will preserve His people, despite the devastation that the Chaldeans will cause.

Here we see the government or providence of God. It is about the question of how God rules the world. Often things go differently than we expect. God is the holy God, who cannot endure sin, while sin continues and increases. On the other hand God promises to bless the righteous. But we see that the righteous suffer, that they are persecuted and oppressed. How does God's government deal with this? The wicked ones surround the righteous. How is it possible that God allows that to happen? How is it possible that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?

Asaph also struggled with that problem (Psa 73:10-14). Until he entered God's sanctuary and learned to see things from God's perspective (Psa 73:15-16). It is all about patience and trust that God is not going out of control. It will be all right. Job also struggled with it, as we read in his book. Job argues: 'God rewards the righteous and punishes the ungodly. I am a righteous one and yet God punishes me. How is that possible?' His friends think they know the answer, and say that he must have sinned heavily because he suffers so much.

We see the same problem in the book of Esther, where evil also seems to prevail. God does not seem to be present, but He is there anyway. The book of Ecclesiastes is also about the government of God, in which so much is described that we cannot understand, but from which we learn that we may leave everything to Him.

From all these examples we learn that God does not allow Himself to be called to account. What we also learn is that the great answer to this problem is God Himself and that we can trust Him. Ultimately, His right will triumph. We cannot understand God, but we can trust Him. We can try to explain something to our children, but see that they don't understand. Then we say that they are too little to understand, but that they can trust

us. Leave it to Father. We have to learn to depend on God and to go our way in trust in Him.

This is always the answer of faith to things that overwhelm the believer, things over which he has no control. The righteous trusts in God Who is the Rock. He is omnipotent and unshakable. God's intentions can be nullified by nothing and no one. Habakkuk then says in faith that the Chaldeans are "appointed to judge" and not to destroy. A disciplinary rod is to restore, not to destroy.

A father punishes his child not to kill it, but to form his character (Heb 12:10). God recognizes us as His children when He punishes us. He punishes us precisely because we are His children (Pro 3:12; Job 5:17). This is also what Habakkuk believes most deeply. Therefore, he does not allow the problem he sees to undermine his faith. His questions do not come from distrust, but from incapacity and incomprehension.

Hab 1:13 | Why Does God Not Intervene?

*13 [Your] eyes are too pure to approve evil,
And You can not look on wickedness [with favor].
Why do You look with favor
On those who deal treacherously?
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up
Those more righteous than they?*

Though there is trust, faith has its exercises when it sees that God sees such an injustice and remains silent. Habakkuk is sure that God's "eyes are too pure to approve evil". He knows that from the teaching of God's Word and through his own dealings with God. The purity of God is something that is constantly taught to God's people. In the wilderness their camp had to be pure because of the presence of the holy God in their midst. No one who was unclean was allowed to enter the sanctuary of the LORD (2Chr 23:19). Habakkuk also knows that God cannot look on wickedness with favor.

It is precisely the knowledge that God cannot see all this that causes the tormenting question of why God remains unmoved when He sees how there are people "who deal treacherously" with His people. The word

“treacherously” also has the meaning of being unfaithful to appointments or agreements. It is the unscrupulous promise of something, with the intention of not keeping the promise. How can God tolerate such behavior? How can He remain silent, when He sees that “the wicked one” serves as a disciplinary rod for someone “more righteous” than that wicked one? By “those more righteous,” is meant the believing remnant.

Hab 1:14 | Defenseless People

*14 [Why] have You made men like the fish of the sea,
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?*

Habakkuk is dismayed that Babylon is so raging against the people. God gives people “like the fish” and “like creeping things” in his hand. By letting the Babylonians, for whom the life of a human being is like the life of a fish and creeping things, loose on His people, God makes the life of His people as cheap as those things. Fish are caught with a net, with no chance of escape.

Fish and creeping things are dumb, they don’t make a sound and have no right or defense, there is no one to protect and defend them. In this way they, who fall into the hands of the Babylonians, are unable to help themselves. In addition, they are “without a ruler”, which means that they lack effective leadership to organize their defense. The king who reigns over His people does not give leadership, but is only concerned with how he can save himself. It seems as if God has ceased to be their King (Isa 63:19).

Hab 1:15 | The Success and Joy of Babylon

*15 [The Chaldeans] bring all of them up with a hook,
Drag them away with their net,
And gather them together in their fishing net.
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.*

The previous verse shows Judah as defenseless fish being fished out of their land and brought to Babylon. In this verse we see the materials, the means the Chaldeans use to achieve their successes, the subjugation and extermination of peoples. They are called a “hook”, “net” and “fishing

net". The Chaldeans "rejoice and are glad" about these means and the successes achieved by them.

The words "rejoice" and "glad" are often used in connection with worship and praise (1Chr 16:31; Psa 14:7; Joel 2:21,23; Zec 10:7). It is not only joyfulness, but a reaction to something that is appreciated and honored. It means here that Babylon idolizes himself. He praises his material and is proud of himself for the successes he has achieved. The following verse shows even more clearly the religious homage to himself.

Hab 1:16 | Tribute to the Idols

*16 Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net
And burn incense to their fishing net;
Because through these things their catch is large,
And their food is plentiful.*

The word "therefore" links this verse to the previous one, where the idolization of his power has already been hinted at. He does not attribute his successes to God, but to his means. That is why he offers sacrifices to them. With this he idolizes those means, in which we have to think especially of his military strength (verse 11). The sacrifices consist of animals that are slaughtered and sacrificed to the idols. It is a false, idolatrous worship that arises from the greatest arrogance. We have a clear example of this in the golden image Nebuchadnezzar had made of and for himself, which was to be worshiped (Dan 3:1-7).

Because of his enormous military strength, his "catch is large [or: fat]", and his "food is plentiful". Everything he has captured serves to enable him to live his life in luxury and prosperity. With his hook, his net and his fishing net, Nebuchadnezzar drags, among others, the inhabitants of Judah into exile to his country. To him they are a fat booty.

Hab 1:17 | Does Evil Always Continue?

*17 Will they therefore empty their net
And continually slay nations without sparing?*

Habakkuk returns to his question in verse 13. Can the iniquity represented in the intermediate verses always be tolerated by a God of righteousness?

In his despair and defeat, the prophet asks how long the Chaldeans will be successful, without stopping them. Will he always empty his net, in which there is a rich booty, and then take new booty? Can he continue to ruthlessly subjugate and exterminate peoples? The answer will come in the next chapter.

Habakkuk asks the LORD how He can allow that to happen. He struggles with the fact that God does not intervene. After all He has the power to do so, hasn't He? Like Habakkuk, we would also do well to bring our doubts and confusion to God and leave them with Him for a final solution.

Habakkuk 2

Hab 2:1 | Habakkuk Goes to Stand on His Guard Post

*1 I will stand on my guard post
And station myself on the rampart;
And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,
And how I may reply when I am reproved.*

After Habakkuk's second complaint it remains quiet for a while. There does not come, like the first time, an immediate answer from the LORD. That does not bring Habakkuk to despair, but he goes to stand on his guard post. He speaks of "my guard post", by which he indicates that it is a place he personally occupies. A guard post is an elevation from where the surroundings can be searched for danger. For us this means that we must be elevated above the circumstances, close to God, so that we can see things from His perspective and understand His work.

Habakkuk takes that elevated place in order to look forward expectantly to the answer God is going to give. This is the appropriate attitude when we have asked for something. Hurried as we are often, we take little or no time and make little or no effort to climb on the guard post and wait for God's answer. But perseverance must have a perfect result. If we do not get the answer, then we keep looking forward to it. Otherwise God's answer may come and we do not see it. Let us look up and see, as Habakkuk does. He is waiting for the dawn of a new day in which God will work. He looks forward to light in the dark circumstances in which he is.

God does not so much take away our worries and difficulties, but He adds something to our lives. He brings light into our lives in the Person of the Lord Jesus. He comes in our circumstances. Then the problems do not disappear, but they will look different. We, too, have to be open to God's voice to notice what He is going to say to us personally in connection with all the questions that His ways raise in us. And to God's answer, in which a correction may lie, a reaction will come from our side, a reaction that God

also expects. When that attitude is there, God continues speaking in verse 2. There will be more communications.

It is not about a literal guard post, but about standing at a height through which someone is lifted up above earthly events and brought into connection with heaven and Him Who thrones there. Prophets are more often called guardians (Isa 21:8,11; Jer 6:17; Eze 3:17; 33:2-3). They must look at the unrighteousness among the people and warn of the doom that is to come. In this spirit of attentiveness, the prophet is ready to receive the answer.

We must learn to wait. Our impatience counts time we have to wait as lost time. This is not the case with Habakkuk. "What He would speak to [or: in] me" means that the speaking of God to the prophet is done by an inner, not externally audible, voice. With the answer God gives him, the prophet can reply to his reproof (Hab 1:13-17) for himself and that he can also communicate to others.

Hab 2:2 | The Vision Must Be Recorded

2 Then the LORD answered me and said,

"Record the vision

And inscribe [it] on tablets, [Dutch Translation: And inscribe [it] clearly on tablets,]

That the one who reads it may run. [Dutch Translation: That the one who runs by quickly reads it.]

Habakkuk receives answer from the LORD. How long he has waited, is not said. The answer comes in a vision, an inner perceptible revelation of God. He receives a visible message. That answer is not only for him, but also for others, that is for the people. That is why he is commissioned to record the vision. He must not write this vision down on paper, but inscribe it on stone tablets.

By recording it, the vision will be preserved for the future, and by inscribing it, it will be indelible and will not be lost (Isa 30:8; Exo 17:14; Psa 102:18; Jer 30:2). At the same time, the vision does not become dependent on people's memory. The reason for writing it down is given in verse 3.

It must also be recorded clearly (cf. Deu 27:8). The message is so important, that any misunderstanding or careless passing must be excluded. The fact that it must be readable for someone who runs by quickly has to do with the short time that remains before fulfillment comes. Whoever reads it must pass it on. It is a message of joy for Israel. After all, the downfall of the enemy means the deliverance of Israel.

In the answer we see some important principles:

1. The vision or the prophecy must be clearly announced.
2. Everything will remain a vision for a certain time, that is, for the time being unfulfilled.
3. During this time, the man of the world will grow in his pride and thereby become ripe for the judgment of God.
4. During this time, the righteous will live by his faith.
5. At the appointed time, determined by God, the announced vision will be fulfilled. It is therefore rewarding to wait for this goal to come to pass.

Hab 2:3 | The Appointed Time

*3 “For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay.*

“The vision is yet for the appointed time” means that deliverance will not come immediately, but that patience is needed. But it is certain that it will come. God will make the vision of the extermination of the disciplinary rod, Babylon, reality. After seventy years, Babylon will be conquered by the Medes and the Persians. God’s intention cannot be hastened or delayed. It will be fulfilled at the “appointed time”.

The appointed time is also the designated end time. That is “the goal”. This is the double bottom of the prophecy. “The goal” has a deeper meaning than just a short-term event. It is about the coming of Christ and the establishment of the realm of peace (verse 14). This is apparent from the quotation of the last part of this verse in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 10:37). There it appears that this verse is about the second coming of Christ. God

has appointed a time for the second coming of Christ, who will fulfill all promises. We see here that Jesus Christ is the content of the vision.

“Though it tarries” is quoted in Hebrews 10 from the Septuagint and changed to “for yet in a very little while”. The “vision” makes the believer today look forward to Him, to His coming, as an event that is near. When He returns, He will rectify everything. In the end time, the wicked will be judged and the people will be restored and the righteous will be rewarded (2Thes 1:7-7). If the answer tarries, it is because the perseverance must have “a perfect work” (Jam 1:4).

Deliverance does not come a moment later than the moment that God, in His wisdom, has established for it. In that time of waiting, it appears that the righteous lives by his faith, that is, by his faith that he puts on God. We see that in the following verse.

Hab 2:4 | The Proud One and the Righteous

*4 “Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.*

Verse 2 is about the power of the vision, verse 3 is about the certainty of it. Verse 4 shows the importance of faith in case the fulfilment of the vision is delayed. If it is necessary to wait, it is reason for faith to prove itself as the assurance of what is hoped for (Heb 11:1). This can only be done by those who are engaged with Him Who is the center of prophecy, which is Christ.

In this verse we have subdivided humanity into two groups, that is, as God sees it. This is the answer to the struggle of the prophet described in Habakkuk 1:12-17. The first part of this verse concerns the proud, puffed up, overconfident Chaldean. God knows his inner self. Yet God uses him.

“His soul” refers above all to his greed and desires. What he covets does not come from honest desires, but from a depraved, disingenuous, crooked mind. An arrogant man is never sincere. What is said of this man – we can, for example think of Belsazar (Dan 5:22-28) – is also generally applicable to every individual who lives in unbelief.

The second part of the verse applies to the righteous, which is the believer in Israel. He will live by his faith, which is his trust in God (Gen 15:6; 2Chr 20:20; Isa 7:9). The righteous stands in sharp contrast to the proud one. The righteous lives by his faith and his faith brings him to humility before God. Habakkuk does not need to doubt that the pride of the Chaldean will work his own destruction, while the God-fearing constantly looks up to the LORD and will live.

The righteous can, through his faith, live in a world full of iniquity, addressing his questions to God, going his way trusting Him, even though the situation around him does not change. Only when the Lord Jesus returns will He set everything right. Until then, the believer lives by his faith.

Paul is such a reader and runner of whom it is about in verse 2. He has read the answer and passed it on to the believer and to the sinner. He quotes this verse 4

1. in the letter to the Romans (Rom 1:17),
2. in the letter to the Galatians (Gal 3:11) and
3. in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 10:37).

We see that each time a different accent is placed.

1. In Romans 1 he answers with this verse the question of Job: How can a man be righteous with God (Job 9:2)? The answer is that it is possible through the work of redemption accomplished by Christ. Christ has done everything to exterminate the guilt. Whoever believes this, is a righteous one who can live by his faith. The emphasis here is on the righteous. Here we see how a statement from this little book Habakkuk is of fundamental importance for the justification by God in the gospel. Righteousness is not a process, but a final act with a lasting result.

2. Galatians 3 is about faith versus works of the law. Paul quotes this verse of Habakkuk to show that it is impossible to obtain life on the basis of works of the law. Law and faith have no interface whatsoever. The accent here is on faith. Only through faith in God and His Christ is it possible to live as a righteous one.

3. In Hebrews 10 it is, as the context shows, about the contrast between life and death or shrinking back to destruction. The warning is not to shrink

back and to perish, but to live by faith. All the faith heroes of the following chapter, Hebrews 11, have lived by faith. The emphasis here is on living in view of the better fatherland.

As long as the prophetic word has not yet been fulfilled and it is still chaos in the world, the God-fearing has only one hold and that is faith. It is about practical faith to live on earth. Faith is the unshakeable trust in the faithfulness of God that He will fulfill His promises (Psa 89:33-34). Faith submits to God in confidence, while the Chaldean is puffed up and trusts in himself.

Hab 2:5 | The Proud Man Has No Success

5 *“Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,
So that he does not stay at home.
He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,
And he is like death, never satisfied.
He also gathers to himself all nations
And collects to himself all peoples.*

This verse connects to verse 4a, which in its direct application refers to Belsazar. Here the description continues. Belsazar devotes to wine (Dan 5:1-4). This clouds his thinking and leads him to faithlessness. Wine does not give its drinker the desired joy and strength, but leads him to a certain downfall (Pro 23:31-32). In his pride he thinks he rules over everything, but he will not succeed in holding on to his position.

The Babylonians are as insatiable as Sheol and death that swallows its victims with their throats open. They are as insatiable in attracting and subjugating “all nations” as death is in drawing all men to itself (Pro 30:15-16). In his incessant yearning for more, he “collects to himself all peoples” (cf. Ecc 5:10). Behind this proud, arrogant glutton rises the figure of the wicked in the end times, the beast coming up out of the sea (Rev 13:1-10).

Hab 2:6-8 | Taunt-Song, Mockery, Insinuations – First “Woe”

6 *“Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,
Even mockery [and] insinuations against him
And say, ‘Woe to him who increases what is not his –*

*For how long—
And makes himself rich with loans?’
7 “Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,
And those who collect from you awaken?
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.
8 “Because you have looted many nations,
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you—
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,
To the town and all its inhabitants.*

In the form of a taunt-song, the downfall of Babylon is described in verses 6-20. In verse 6 “all of these”, that is the nations, speak. They express themselves in a taunt-song. The song is prophetic in content and has validity for all times and nations (cf. Mic 2:4; Isa 14:4).

A “taunt-song” and “mockery” are actions of people who enjoy mocking others. “Insinuations” are a veiled form of mockery, which must be deciphered. The enigma lies in the fact that it applies to Babylon, but then to the Medes and then to the Greeks and so on. All nations will not only ridicule Babylon, but also use him as an example to point out to others what will happen to those who have no respect for God or their fellow human beings.

The song has five stanzas. Each stanza contains a “woe to him”. The first four begin with it; in the fifth stanza it is in another place (verses 6b,9,12,15,19). Each stanza consists of three verses. There is also a further explanation which is started with “because” or “for”.

The first ‘woe’ comes over him because of the appropriation of goods that do not belong to him. It concerns his looting and plundering. It is the sin of greed, of not being satisfied with what one has. We live in the time when the realm of the beast, that is the united Europe, is taking more and more shape. It is a realm of violence that appropriates what does not belong to it.

“For how long?” is again the question of the tormented soul. The answer to this question is: seventy years. All those from whom Babylon has enriched himself will turn against him (verse 7). Then Babylon himself is the booty of the nations it has exploited. It is conquered by the Medes and the Persians.

The reason for the foregoing is given in verse 8. The surrounding nations will strike Babylon and shake it empty. Babylon will be measured with the same standard of measure they have measured (Mt 7:2).

Hab 2:9-11 | Second “Woe”

9 “*Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house
To put his nest on high,
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!*
10 “*You have devised a shameful thing for your house
By cutting off many peoples;
So you are sinning against yourself.*
11 “*Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,
And the rafter will answer it from the framework.*

The second ‘woe’ comes over Babylon because of his greed and self-exaltation. After the plunder and looting of the ‘woe’ of the previous verses, the ‘evil gain’ is a natural successor, by which he wants to ensure his house of steadfastness and durability (verse 9). ‘Gain’ is here negative, it is ‘evil gain’, because that gain has been unlawfully, in an evil way, obtained.

Babylon has used his loot to secure himself in such a way that he thinks he is inviolable and unreachable to evil, no matter from which side it may come. Nobody can approach him. He thinks in his pride that he will stay out of the grip of evil. He considers his rule as impregnable as an eagle’s nest on high. Building his nest on high characterizes the high-flying thoughts of the heart. With this arrogant attitude and his fortress built high up, Babylon resembles Edom who also felt safe at an impregnable height (Oba 1:3-4).

By “his house” (verse 9) and “your house” (verse 10) is meant the dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, which includes the royal family, including the king. Just as an eagle builds his nest high up to protect it from destruction (Job 39:27), so the Chaldean tries to raise and strengthen his kingdom through robbery and looting so that his family cannot be taken away from him.

By wickedness Babylon dug the grave of his own structure (verse 10). What he means as strengthening himself will become a disgrace to him. Everything that is directed against God will return on him like a boomerang

(Jer 7:19). Whatever the wicked has in mind to satisfy his ambition, greed, pleasure, or whatever desire, the only thing this selfish pursuit leads to is shame and death.

God, however, says: "He who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death" (Pro 8:36b). This applies to a great extent to Babylon. The judgment that afflicts him is the counterpart of the judgments he himself has brought on others. Whatever a man sows, he will reap.

Even the inanimate things will accuse Babylon of blood guilts and sin and testify of his wicked actions (verse 11; cf. Lk 19:40). Likewise with all the works of God: they have a voice and witnesses of Him by Whom they were created. Similarly, all the works of a man have a voice and testify of him who created them or used them. The crying of the stone is because of the crimes committed in order to build with them. The stones cry out for revenge (cf. Gen 4:10), because they have been robbed or bought with robbed money in order to build. The answer of the rafter has the meaning of agreeing to the cry of the stone.

Hab 2:12-14 | Third "Woe"

12 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed
And founds a town with violence!"

13 "Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts
That peoples toil for fire,
And nations grow weary for nothing?"

14 "For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
As the waters cover the sea."

The third 'woe' comes over Babylon because of the oppression of conquered peoples. The striving of Babylon to establish his kingdom permanently through sinful gain is also shown in the building of cities with the blood and sweat of subdued peoples (verse 12). The material with which Babylon builds his cities is obtained by bloodshed. Prisoners are used in its construction.

The result of the history of man does not lie in the events themselves, but in the revealed intention of "the LORD of hosts" Who directs the events

(verse 13). He is the cause of the fact that all the edifices which have come into being in this way will not last.

The fact that He presents Himself here as “the LORD of hosts”, means that all the hosts in heaven and earth are at His service, they are under His authority. He is the Supreme Commander over all created powers, but especially over Israel. Everything that stands up against Him is judged by Him. Babylon will experience it when its kingdom finds its end through fire. All his work is in vain. “Toil for fire” means that their hard labor that consumed the forces with which they built the city, all that hard labor and its results will turn out to be fuel for the fire that will consume them. Nothing remains of it (Jer 51:58).

Unlike verse 13, what does remain is what comes in its place: the kingdom of God (verse 14). When all human hostile powers are wiped out, the kingdom of God and of His Christ will replace all kingdoms. As a result, the earth will be filled “with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” (Num 14:21; Isa 11:9). “The waters” that “covers the sea” is a picture of the overwhelming fullness, in its length, breadth and depth.

God’s intention when He created the earth was that it would reflect His glory. His glory later filled the tabernacle and the temple, His dwelling place on earth. Soon the whole earth will be His dwelling place. Everything on earth will then be in complete agreement with Him, so that He can rest again in His works. He will then be praised forever (Psa 72:19).

Hab 2:15-17 | Fourth “Woe”

15 *“Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,
Who mix in your venom even to make [them] drunk
So as to look on their nakedness!*

16 *“You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.
Now you yourself drink and expose your [own] nakedness.
The cup in the LORD’s right hand will come around to you,
And utter disgrace [will come] upon your glory.*

17 *“For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
And the devastation of [its] beasts by which you terrified them,
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,*

| *To the town and all its inhabitants.*

From cruelty in the third ‘woe’, the prophet in the fourth ‘woe’ about Babylon moves to his shameless treatment of his “neighbors”, whom he should love. Drunkenness makes shameless (verse 15; Gen 9:21). Babylon gets the nations drunk to let his lusts run wild.

God will make Babylon drunk and strip him of all feelings of shame and make him naked and take away all honor (verse 16; Jer 25:15). Babylon is given the cup to drink that he has given others to drink, that he may also lie down drunk. This cup is given to him by the LORD. Jeremiah also speaks of the cup of the LORD, which is full of his wrath, and which he gives the nations to drink (Jer 25:26).

The “utter disgrace” can also be translated by “disgraceful vomit”. This shows that everything that they have swallowed in their voracity comes out again as vomit. What was their glory then, will now be covered with this vomit. Thus the LORD will cause Babylon to wallow like a drunk in his own vomit, which will be a disgusting and nauseating sight.

They deforested Lebanon in the north, where they entered the country, making it bare and bald through their military campaigns (verse 17). They killed the animals that were there. Land, city and inhabitants in verse 8 refer to the nations, while here Judah and Jerusalem with its inhabitants are meant. Babylon has caused a massacre there. But the violence he has inflicted on others will return on his own head, so that he will be covered up underneath.

Hab 2:18-19 | Fifth “Woe”

18 “What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,
[Or] an image, a teacher of falsehood?

For [its] maker trusts in his [own] handiwork
When he fashions speechless idols.

19 “Woe to him who says to a [piece of] wood, ‘Awake!’
To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’

[And] that is [your] teacher?
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,
And there is no breath at all inside it.

The fifth and final ‘woe’ comes over Babylon because of the greatest of all sins: idolatry. This “woe” is pronounced in the second part of this stanza (verse 19). This evil is focused directly against the LORD Himself. The LORD is replaced by a self-made image.

To powerfully indicate its utter worthlessness, the prophet asks what use an idol has (verse 18; Isa 44:9-10; Jer 2:11). Of course, an idol is of no use at all. The idol is “a carved” image that teaches lies. The idol is a “a teacher of falsehood” who promotes to his worshipers the delusion that he is God and can do what can be expected of the true God, while it is a void idol. How foolish it is to rely on something made by one’s own hands.

An idol can be so overlaid with all earthly riches, it is and remains a dead thing, there is no life in it and life never comes into it (verse 19). Such a god can do nothing for anyone. It is supreme foolishness to call to dead matter in the expectation that there will be a reaction. Even worse is that by such worship of an idol the true God is denied. God does not give His glory to anyone else. He who despises Him will be despised by Him (1Sam 2:30b). He pronounces His “woe” on those who call on an idol.

Hab 2:20 | Be Silent Before God

20 *“But the LORD is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth be silent before Him.”*

After the song, the contrast suddenly comes out of Habakkuk’s mouth. Habakkuk has become a different person. He has been impressed by everything he has seen and heard about Who God is. The word “but” with which he begins, points to the contrast that exists between the idols and the living God, Who sees and rules everything. He is not hidden behind gold and silver, but alive in heaven, “His holy temple”, ready and willing to help His people.

He is the Almighty One in Whose presence it is appropriate to remain silent with reverence (Zec 2:13; Zep 1:7a), in the awareness that He makes the judgment go forth. This applies to the whole earth, for He is the God of “all the earth”. Silence is due to Him because of His impressive majesty. It suits man to be silent before God. What He has to say is more important

than what we have to say. Habakkuk especially calls on the proud braggarts to keep their mouths shut before that majesty.

Job is also silent when he comes face to face with God and proclaims: “I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40:4). He becomes silent before God. Then God can speak to him. He is an example to us in this. When we become silent before God, He can answer our questions.

Habakkuk 3

Hab 3:1 | A Prayer of Habakkuk

| *1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.*

Here begins a new section, which is indicated by referring again to “Habakkuk the prophet” (Hab 1:1). In contrast with the call from the last verse of the previous chapter (Hab 2:20), Habakkuk does not remain silent. He brings in his silence a hymn of praise to God (Psa 65:1b).

His praise is “a prayer”. It is called a prayer to indicate the dedication of this part, it is dedicated to God. It is a prayer because the time of fulfillment has not yet come. The prayer exposes the feelings of the prophet after he heard in Habakkuk 1 about the judgment that God must bring on His people and in Habakkuk 2 by whom He will do so.

The fact that his name and his service are mentioned indicates that this prayer is not only about feelings, but corresponds to the data mentioned earlier and that this prayer is also prophetic in content. It is a testimony of the Holy Spirit in the feelings of the prophet who is enlightened by the Spirit.

“Sjigionot” is a term from music. A similar term, Shiggaion, can be found in the opening words of Psalm 7 (Psa 7:1). The term seems to indicate that it is a victory song, a song that is sung in great excitement, with rapidly changing emotions. This term shows that there is a connection between this song and the psalms. It is also an indication that Habakkuk not only expresses his thoughts in this way, but composes this ‘psalm’ for use in Israel.

Hab 3:2 | The Work of the LORD

| *2 LORD, I have heard the report about You [and] I fear.*

O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years,

In the midst of the years make it known;

In wrath remember mercy.

Now Habakkuk speaks about the fact that the LORD answered him, while at first he struggled so much that God did not hear him (Hab 1:2). His first exercise in God's presence is characterized by fear when he realizes that the condition of the people is so bad, that God must judge them. What the prophet in Habakkuk 2 heard about the Babylonians filled him with terror and fear. He now expresses to God that He will fulfill His work, both through Babylon towards Israel and towards Babylon himself. His work is a work in judgment against the enemy and in grace against Israel. We see that work taking shape.

It's about His work, "Your work", not ours. What is needed is that God revives His work. It is not a work at the beginning or at the end, but "in the midst of the years". The beginning is the beginning of God's work in the redemption of Israel. The end is the salvation of Israel in the end time. The mean time is the time in which the prophet lives. He lives between the time of the chastisement of the LORD by Babylon as a necessary beginning of the redemption and the breaking of Babylon by the LORD.

It is a prayer of those who are in the midst of their life. Then the feeling may come that the first forces have disappeared and that the success of the previous days cannot be repeated. But let us remember that it is God's work and that He can revive it in the midst of the years. He can make that known to us when we have forgotten or need it. When we are struggling and feel God's discipline, we may remind Him of His mercy.

The people have forfeited any right to salvation, but the mercy of God can be addressed. Merit cannot be invoked, but mercy can be invoked. If it is invoked, it means an acknowledgment of guilt (Psa 51:1b). As far as Israel is concerned, the prophet asks God to temper His wrath through mercy. God will do this to the faithful among His people.

Hab 3:3 | The Appearance of God

*3 God comes from Teman,
And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.
His splendor covers the heavens,
And the earth is full of His praise.*

Actually only verse 2 is a prayer. What follows from verse 3 is a repetition of the deeds of God in the past regarding the earlier redemption of His people. Sometimes we ask God to do things for us, while it is more rewarding to think about what He has done to and in us in and through the Lord Jesus in the redemption He has worked.

Verses 3-15 describe the appearance of God, also called theophany. God appears to judge the enemies of His people and to deliver His people. He makes His glory visible. He does so in judgment on His enemies and in salvation for His people. He is the Creator and Ruler of the world, the One for Whom everyone should show respect and the One Who controls all things.

He “comes”, indicates an activity. It shows God in His actions. It reminds of God’s appearance to His people on Mount Sinai (Exo 19:16-19). Here we are talking about other places. “Teman” is a place closely related to Edom (Jer 49:7). “Paran” is located west of Edom. Both places are located south of Judah.

He appears as “the Holy One” (cf. Hab 1:12). In that capacity He judges. Habakkuk is engaged in setting aside hostile powers. In the appearance of God he sees the future salvation. He bases this appearance on what has become visible in the past of God. Just as He appeared on Mount Sinai after the redemption from Egypt, so Habakkuk sees it happening here in faith in the future. Everywhere in the heavens that cover the earth, His majesty, that is His exaltation and dignity as Ruler, is observed. The effect of this on the earth under heaven is that it is full of praise for Him.

Habakkuk indicates that restoration always comes by returning to the beginning (cf. Deu 33:2). He sees God’s glory, just as on Mount Sinai, revealing itself again and taking the same route. God comes to defeat the enemies and to redeem His people. This gets its fulfillment at the return of the Lord Jesus.

When God acts on behalf of His people to bless it, He also has blessing in mind for heaven and earth. It sometimes seems that He works in a limited sphere, but He wants the whole creation to share in the blessing.

‘Selah’ indicates a rest or break. This word occurs about seventy times in Psalms and three times in this chapter.

Hab 3:4 | He Comes in Consuming Glow

*4 [His] radiance is like the sunlight;
He has rays [flashing] from His hand,
And there is the hiding of His power.*

The reflection of His appearance is perceptible everywhere. The Lord Jesus comes like lightning (Mt 24:27). The sunlight in His illuminating radiance is the most appropriate earthly element to represent the immaculate purity of the Holy One, He Who is light and in Whom “there is no darkness at all” (1Jn 1:5) and “with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jam 1:17b).

Yet those impressive revelations of radiance and splendor are merely outward manifestations of God that people can perceive (Psa 104:2a). In reality, they are a covering or concealment of His true attributes. These revelations act as a veil covering His power. If He would show His might uncovered, everything would be consumed. He is the God Who “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1Tim 6:16).

The concealment of His might and His light became visible when the Lord Jesus came to earth as the light, to redeem. His might was concealed and was hidden in His Manhood. That He has become Man is, as it were, the ‘casing of His might. It was hidden from the wise and intelligent, but not from the children (Mt 11:25) nor from the woman who touched Him in faith and experienced the power that emanated from Him (Lk 8:43-48).

Hab 3:5 | Instruments of Judgment

*5 Before Him goes pestilence,
And plague comes after Him.*

God’s might is revealed here in the exercise of His judgment through the plague of “pestilence”. He consumes through pestilence what is before Him and leaves the “plague” of a charred ground behind. The holy God is accompanied by the performers of His judgment, pestilence and plague.

Pestilence and plague are presented as persons. One person goes before Him as a shield bearer (cf. 1Sam 17:7), the other person comes directly after Him as a servant (cf. 1Sam 25:42). It points out that His coming to the

deliverance of His people will be accompanied by plagues that will hit the earth.

Hab 3:6-7 | God's Ways Are Everlasting

*6 He stood and surveyed the earth;
He looked and startled the nations.
Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,
The ancient hills collapsed.*

*His ways are everlasting.
7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.*

In these two verses we see what impression the coming of God makes on creation and on mankind. God has come from afar and has positioned Himself here as it were as a war hero to judge the enemies.

1. "He stood" is not a pose, a static posture, but the overwhelming presence of His Person, for Whom nothing can remain motionless. Where He is, everything "trembles" (as the word for "surveyed" also can be translated).

2. "He looked" has the same effect. When He looks, it is a penetrating looking, a complete fathoming. The nations react to that with "startling".

His standing and his looking have a radiance, they do something. They are impressive activities.

All that has been created, however long it may exist, such as "the perpetual mountains" and "the ancient hills", will disappear. It seems as if the long existence cannot be affected, so many centuries they have already defied, so that there is no thought of change. For mankind they exist eternally. But when He comes, even the greatest symbols of stability and immutability do not endure and turn out to be temporary and transient.

All this is in opposition to His "everlasting" ways, which truly remain everlasting because they are "His ways". The stability and permanence of God's ways in Christ, as seen in His holy temple, are the trust and joy of faith.

Then Habakkuk shows the reaction of two nomadic peoples (verse 7). If the earth trembles and the nations startle if He shatters perpetual mountains and collapses ancient hills, what then is the reaction of small nations? In their tents there is under distress. When God, in His majesty, passes by them in His march, they are so impressed that they tremble.

“Cushan” is the extended form of Cush. Its population lives on the African coast of the Red Sea. The population of Midian lives on the Arab coast of the Red Sea.

Hab 3:8-9 | The Anger of the LORD

*8 Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
Or [was] Your anger against the rivers,
Or [was] Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,
On Your chariots of salvation?
9 Your bow was made bare,
The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah.
You cleaved the earth with rivers.*

So far the prophet has described how the LORD appears. Now he goes from descriptive to addressing. He speaks to the LORD (verse 8). God has taken position as the Judge of the world, as a war hero equipped for battle, and now the prophet asks about whom His anger is coming. Not that he expects an answer. It is more to emphasize the greatness of the Divine anger.

He speaks of rivers and the sea in general terms, although here one can also think of the rivers Nile, Jordan, and the Red Sea as the target of God’s power (Exo 7:14-25; Exo 14:16-22; Jos 3:13-17). He judged the Nile and made a way through the other two waters. His concern was the “salvation” of His people. Therefore He rode (symbolically) on His horses and used (symbolically) His chariots.

In verse 9 the picture of the fighting God with His horses and chariots is continued. He carried out His intention to intervene. All preparations were made. The bow as a weapon was made visible and ready for use. We see it in front of us: the Warrior in the chariot Who with the spanned bow ap-

proaches or rushes to or after the enemy to kill him. He thereby fulfills the oath He had sworn to the patriarchs, which led Him to deliver the tribes of Israel (Deu 32:40-42).

With an enormous, propelled water mass the LORD cleaves the earth (cf. Mic 1:4). Possibly this refers to “the fountains of the great deep” that burst open the earth (cf. Gen 7:11). It shows God’s omnipotence in His judgment. He can drain rivers for His people and thereby make the earth impassable for the enemies of His people.

Hab 3:10 | God’s Power Over the Flood of Water

*10 The mountains saw You [and] quaked;
The downpour of waters swept by.
The deep uttered forth its voice,
It lifted high its hands.*

The powers on earth look up trembling at God’s majesty and give Him glory. The mountains and the flood of water are presented as persons. They tremble, let their voices be heard and raise their hands to express their awe for Him. What a cautionary example this is for the pruning man, who believes that ‘his strength is his god’ (Hab 1:11).

To express his feelings in the situation in which he finds himself, Habakkuk uses Psalm 77 (Psa 77:16-20) in his description. The poet of the psalm has the same feelings as he does. This is because they are led by the same Spirit.

Hab 3:11 | God’s Power Over the Sun and Moon

*11 Sun [and] moon stood in their places;
They went away at the light of Your arrows,
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.*

Sun and moon are the constant and inviolable symbols of the created order in creation. But they cease their function at the sight of God’s majesty and cease their centuries-long course. Their light retreats, they withdraw their shine at the sight of God’s majesty’s that surpasses all shine. Their light is superfluous at the light of God’s arrows and the radiance of His gleaming spear (cf. Isa 60:19).

It is not obvious to refer here to the miracle at Gibeon at the conquest of the land, where Joshua commands the sun and the moon to stand still (Jos 10:12). There they have continued to shine, while here it is a question of withdrawing their luster out of reverence for God's majestic appearance which far surpasses their luster.

God's arrows and spear are shooting- and throwing weapons that He uses against the enemy as a means to express His anger. Perhaps we can think of lightning rays emanating from God's throne that terrify people. People have no control over that. Fear overwhelms them when they are surrounded by lightning.

Hab 3:12-13 | Judgment and Salvation

*12 In indignation You marched through the earth;
In anger You trampled the nations.
13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For the salvation of Your anointed.
You struck the head of the house of the evil
To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.*

The LORD marches through the earth in indignation and judges the nations (verse 12; Isa 63:1-6). He tramples or threshes as with a thirsty sled the nations, which means that He beats them. It entails an extremely painful and deeply humiliating defeat of the nations who have always hurt and humiliated His people so much.

This is the result of the going forth of the LORD. But He not only went forth to judge His enemies. In verse 13 we hear the reason for His interference with the earth. So that no one remains in any doubt as to why this revelation of the majesty of God, Habakkuk says that God went forth to deliver and save His people, who are His "anointed" (cf. Psa 105:15).

"The house of the evil" refers to the house of Pharaoh in the past and that of the king of Babylon (Hab 2:9) who is coming soon. The evil is the enemy who is coming, presented in all his governmental power. In the end times this refers to the Antichrist. The "head of the house" is possibly the king himself. He is at the top. In faith, Habakkuk sees that the LORD strikes the house of the evil, from top to bottom, to "the foundation" ['thigh' is liter-

ally ‘foundation’], which is to the ground (cf. Amos 2:9b). All that remains is dust.

Hab 3:14-15 | The Enemy Exterminated – God’s People Saved

*14 You pierced with his own spears
The head of his throngs.
They stormed in to scatter us;
Their exultation [was] like those
Who devour the oppressed in secret.
15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses,
On the surge of many waters.*

Habakkuk identifies himself with God’s people and describes the treatment that the invaders of the land will receive from God. He describes that the LORD causes the enemies to suffer defeat through their own hands (Jdg 7:22; 1Sam 14:20; 2Chr 20:23-24). For Habakkuk this is a great encouragement because he has experienced how the enemies stormed in. He knows how they rejoiced in making life in the land impossible for him. They rejoiced in their atrocities as the believer rejoices in God.

They wanted to “devour” him, which relates to the violent occupation of his life and everything he has. Here he represents as “the oppressed” the faithful remnant of Israel that will be in great distress in the end times because of the approaching enemy.

God led the hostile armies and led them to their doom (verse 15). We see this with Pharaoh, who first hardened his heart himself, after which his heart was hardened by God. In his hardening, he began the pursuit of God’s people and perished in the Red Sea. Before Pharaoh arrived there with his horses, God’s horses entered the great, raging waters and paved the way for his people (verse 8). What seemed an impediment to deliverance became in God’s hand the means of extermination of the enemy. Thus, in the future, He will exterminate the nations that are storming in to His people in great numbers and in great hubris.

Hab 3:16 | Habakkuk Trembles and Waits Quietly

| 16 I heard and my inward parts trembled,

*At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise [who] will invade us.*

The prophet sees what will come over his people at the coming of the Chaldeans. What he “heard” refers back to verse 2. This filled him with fear that penetrated his inward parts and bones, the soft and the hard parts of his body. Daniel had the same experience (Dan 8:27; 10:8). Habakkuk did not tremble out of fear, but because of the impressiveness of what he heard; he was upended.

At the same time, there is a deep calm in view of “the day of distress” (cf. Psa 94:13). The day of distress is the great tribulation (Mt 24:21; Rev 7:14; Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1). Here it is the day of distress for Babylon, “the people ... [who] will invade us”. Habakkuk knows that he will come through that day because the LORD will defeat the enemy. We see a preview of this in the judgment of Belsazar (Dan 5:30).

It is hard for Habakkuk to see that the inevitable blow that God must give His people is done by such a wicked enemy. The effect on him is the flowing away of all power. In himself he sees only misery and destruction. But his fellowship with God and the reflection on His ways and also on His promises give him confidence besides fear. That is the result of the spiritual exercise Habakkuk went through.

This will also be the result of our spiritual exercises when things happen that we cannot understand, but of which we learn to see that God is above it and has His purpose, a purpose for the benefit of us as His own. To the extent that everything in and of us is gone and all trust in ourselves is gone, to that extent our trust in God will increase. If we tremble inwardly because of being in God’s presence and seeing His ways, there will be nothing that makes us tremble in view of external events, people’s ways.

Hab 3:17-18 | In Spite of Everything Joy in the LORD

*17 Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,*

*[Though] the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
18 Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

Then Habakkuk's eye goes up. He no longer seeks rest in the circumstances, but finds his source of rest in God Himself. In the song he speaks about the blessings of the land that are no longer enjoyed because of the time of distress (verse 17). For us it can be a loss of job or health or a loved one, as Job experienced it.

We can sing these verses enthusiastically as a song, but our circumstances are often unlike those of which we sing in this song. We have plenty of everything and nothing is lacking. Could we really sing it if we experience a setback, a loss? Whether we can really sing this will become clear when we are put to the test.

With the words "Yet I will" (verse 18) there comes a twist. Not only is there peace in God, while the Chaldean destroys everything in the land, but there is also exultation in Him. This is one of the most powerful revelations of the working of faith we have in the Bible. We can compare this with the joy of the apostle Paul about which he writes several times in the letter to the Philippians and that while he is in captivity (Phil 1:4,25; 2:2,29; 3:1).

Hab 3:19 | The LORD Is My Strength

*19 The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' [feet],
And makes me walk on my high places.
For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.*

If the source of our faith is God Himself, it gives new strength, it gives wings (Isa 40:29-31). We don't have that power in ourselves. The Lord is our power to overcome oppression and go our way in freedom (cf. Psa 18:33-34; 2Sam 22:34). Spiritual power can only be found in the Lord and is gained by us in our fellowship with Him.

“Feet like hinds’ [feet]” belong to a brave warrior (2Sam 1:23; 1Chr 12:8) in order to be able to attack the enemy quickly and prosecute him quickly when he flees. Hinds are female deer, light-footed animals. Our walk becomes light when we have found our strength in the Lord.

Habakkuk finds the answer to all his questions of faith in God Himself. He will continue to trust in Him. Even though all blessings fall away, He remains. “Walk on my high places” can be applied for us to be busy with the letter to the Ephesians, in which it is made clear to us what it means to be seated in Christ in the heavenly places. The “high places” are the mountains, here as places of blessing (Deu 33:29). It is on these heights that the believer finds himself. They are “my high places”, it is the abode that every believer may personally know and enjoy.

The last sentence assumes that there are several people with whom Habakkuk sings the song of this chapter. We can deduce that from the words “for the choir director”, which are also as a heading above more than fifty psalms. A choir director presupposes a choir. In that choir everyone has his own personal contribution, which we can deduce from the words “my stringed instruments”. Everyone is allowed to sing along in this choir with his own voice. However, it is important that each choir member pays attention to the choir director. Then it will be a harmonious choir, which does not let any discord be heard.

Habakkuk is a choir member. He is also a representative of the faithful remnant. In the darkest days of Israel’s history, on the eve of exile, he is able to express himself in a way that corresponds to the most glorious days of blessing. This is a great triumph of faith. The service practiced during his time in Jerusalem in the temple is merely a service of forms, an insult to God. For the faith of Habakkuk there is another temple, a spiritual temple, where wonderful things are heard and seen and for which the LORD can be praised.

So we see that this book, which starts with someone who complains, ends with someone who, together with others, and at the same time very personally rejoices in God and honors Him.

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